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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Maybe I'm getting older... Okay, so according to life and the calendar, that's a pretty stupid statement to make. But, besides the obvious, it's becoming more difficult to juggle around a busy schedule, which includes more than the usual physical activity that I'm used to dealing with. I just don't have the energy (or the necessary amount of time) to consider a good editorial topic, sit down and work it over in my mind, and then put it all down "on paper" in time for you all to enjoy it!

So, for another week, I'm going to have to beg off adding some witty remarks to this week's issue. So, I know that I can rely on Joe to have some great comments this week to keep you all entertained!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I'm not at all sure how long this column is going to be this week, but there's just one thing I want to touch on and then we'll get to the UseNet messages. Okay?

This past week, everybody's favorite media darling and talking point, Sarah Palin, was in New York. David Letterman of The Tonight Show, who does a "Top Ten List", used Palin's visit this time around. This list was...

Top Ten Highlights of Sarah Palin's Trip To New York City

10. Visited New York landmarks she normally only sees from Alaska
9. Laughed at all the crazy-looking foreigners entering the U.N.
8. Made moose jerky on Rachel Ray
7. Keyed Tina Fey's car
6. After and wink and a not, ended up with a kilo of crack
5. Made coats out of New York City rat pelts

4. Sat in for Kelly Ripa. Regis couldn’t tell the difference
3. Finally met one of those Jewish people Mel Gibson’s always talking about
2. Bought makeup at Bloomingdale’s to update her ’Slutty Flight Attendant" look

And the number one highlight of Sarah Palin’s Trip to New York...

1. Especially enjoyed not appearing on Letterman

Now granted, not all of them are funny, but I found number two to be particularly apropos. Palin has always seemed to me to be an adult parody of a horny drunk cheerleader. "Flight Attendant" is funny because of her hair style. I can picture her up in the front of a plane giving the emergency/seatbelt/oxygen mask tutorial like she’s vying for an Academy Award, complete with lots of eye-winking, cheek-sucking and lip licking. I must confess, I just don’t get it. Yes, she is fairly attractive... in my opinion... and until she speaks... but so are hundreds of thousands or millions of other women in this country; certainly more than the entire population of the state of Alaska. What makes her so special?

Anyway, Letterman continued through the show with "Palin" jokes. A couple, anyway. And I laughed at both of them. They centered around Palin’s daughter. One was about Palin having to keep Elliot Spitzer, former governor of New York and prostitute patron, away from her daughter. The other was about an embarrassing moment for Palin while attending a Yankees baseball game... that during the seventh inning stretch, A-Rod knocked up her daughter.

Now, I took both of these to be about Bristol, Sarah Palin’s (now) 18 year old daughter. Conservative mouthpieces and talking heads have conveniently taken it to mean Willow, Palin’s 14 year old. I guess I can see that, because Willow was there at the game and Bristol wasn’t. But I made the connection that it was about the daughter who’d gotten pregnant already... Bristol.

Well, things got kind of nutty after that, with both Sarah and Tawd (add your own Lisa Lubner accent here) complaining that it was about having sex. with a minor. Okay, point taken and it needs to be addressed. But if that was the case, why are the Palins only now talking about this topic? Bristol was only 17 when she became pregnant.

So the following night, Letterman talked about it during the show. I thought it was very well done, and afforded all the decorum and seriousness that making fun of the Governor demanded. Of course, he re-read the jokes too. Way to go Dave!

If you’re interested, you can find a video of the Top Ten List here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEvkOPidWkY

And Letterman’s little talk about it the following night here: http://tinyurl.com/lqydg5 [URL modified by Editor]

Okay, let’s get on with the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet, huh?

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

’Phantom’ asks:

"Anyone remember Chameleon? IF so, what was it for?"

Steve Sheppard tells Phantom:

"It was a terminal emulation program by John Palevich (sp?) originally distributed through Atari's APX program.

I used Chameleon (tape version) many times to submit programming assignments to school (way back when). Using tape and the slow transfer rate (300 baud) was incredibly cumbersome but it beat driving to school at 2:00 AM (the only time the campus terminals seemed to be available)."

Rvan Collins adds:

"I was in the same boat, used it most of my freshman year with my little xm301 modem and 800xl. I at least had a disk drive though."

Mark Bedingfield adds:

"There was also a loadable desk accessory called Chameleon. It allowed you to load and unload ACC's at will."

Ekkehard Flessa agrees:

"That used to be an accessory for SingleTOS that would allow you to load (and unload) other accessories at runtime."

Guillaume Tello asks about the power supply for the STacy, the portable ST:

"I have a Stacy without its power unit. But I have an IBM one with those characteristics:

OUTPUT 20 - 10 V =
2.00 - 3.37 A

Can it be used as a replacement?

Another question... This IBM AC adapter has 4 pins:
1) Ground
2) +
3) -
4) Input signal

What is the 4th for??"

Greg Goodwin adds:

"The STacy expects an input between 10.6 and 18VDC. (The STacy has a 'power low' light that comes on around 11.5V. However, the STacy keeps running until somewhere around 10.5V).

I experimented with the STacy in 2001 and made several posts in 2002 regarding powering the STacy with batteries. Here's a brief summary:

Don't use "C" cells! Atari and I both tried it, and it doesn't work well (you get 15 minutes per charge). With some expensive high-amperage cells you can get 30 minutes, but internal packs just don't have enough juice!

However, a 12V cord to a 12V battery will work, but since the "power low" light comes on at 11.5V you will have the "power low" light on frequently. Also, you need to have a large enough battery to handle the drain. Expect to use 2 - 3 Ah (Amp-Hours) of capacity for each hour of use for large (auto-sized) batteries and 3 - 4 Ah of capacity for smaller batteries due to the voltage drop. The commonly available "jumpstart" batteries typically hold 14 - 21 Ah and thus I'd suspect that they'd work for several hours. (FWIW, I used a 40 pound 72 Ah lead-acid wheelchair battery (13.8V) to power the STacy for several years and managed over 24 hours a charge!)

Before I go, let me note that I'm going off of memory, although I'm reasonably certain my numbers are accurate. Still, no warranties are given or implied."

Mark Duckworth posts this about bargain hunting:

"I troll my local Craigslist twice daily for Atari stuff and wouldn't you know it an Atari 520ST with 1MB, 2 SF314's, 1 SC1224, and 1 set of VERY archaic (full height) scsi drives with what looks to be an adscsi was sold to me for $30. He said he had all kinds of responses but I was the first to actually show up or even make an appointment. It's really nice to get a hold of what is an exact copy of my first computer ever and at such an ebay (shipping, bleh) beating deal. This time I won't let go of it so easily! I've been doing this for a year and a half! It takes dedication."

Ben Smith of Bravo Sierra Computers tells Mark:

"I believe the Adaptec Controller is for MFM or RLL and you'll still need a SCSI Host Adapter to make it work! It's hard to find MFM or RLL Hard Drives!"

'Leed' adds:

"That's AWESOME. The AdSCSI alone is worth a mint!"

Mark explains:

"It's NOT an adscsi. It's an adaptec 4000 something or other. I never knew such a thing existed? Maybe it's an MFM controller... I didn't look at the drives yet but it would kind of make sense given that they are like 10 and 20mb. Either way, I'm totally stoked to have a little unmolested piece of history. There's even docs on there from the mid to late 80's. The setup, with quick ST and gdos and maxifile.. Priceless. It literally sat in this dude's basement for the last 19 years."

Phantom now asks about using a DVD drive on a Falcon or MegaSTE:

"I have a SCSI 50 pin Matsushita, Model No. LF-D101N. Was thinking of using it on a Falcon or MegaSTE. Does HD Driver support this model? Does ExtenDos Gold/CD Writer support this model?"

Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells Phantom:

"It should, since there is no restriction on the SCSI devices supported by the SCSI driver included in current versions of HDDRIVER. Just run an ID check and check the termination in case the device is not found. Also ensure that SCSI initiator identification is enabled and that the drive does not have the same SCSI ID as the Falcon.

As far as the MegaSTE is concerned a LINK96/97 is required for some SCSI devices. Some devices require the computer to have an SCSI ID of its own (which is mandated by the SCSI standard) in order to work properly."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Will Digital End Stores?
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Suit Against Wii Tossed!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Digital Downloads Spell End for Video Game Stores?

Will digital downloads kill the video games store?

That’s the multibillion dollar question facing retailers from Wal-Mart Stores Inc and Target Corp to GameStop Corp, as Internet distributors continue to grow.

Retailers like Target splashed out on large booths at last week’s E3 Expo in Los Angeles, showcasing games like Activision’s "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen."

But gamers - especially on personal computers - are increasingly turning to alternative methods to play and buy games, such as downloading or "streaming" online games, rather than trekking to a store.

Take industry veteran Dave Perry, whose Gaikai online system lets PC gamers buy and stream games through their Web browsers without needing to download any content.

"Our solution is not to dive into a fight with Sony (Corp), Microsoft (Corp), Nintendo Co Ltd, as it wouldn’t gain any ’new audience’ for publishers," Perry said. "Instead, our strategy is 100 percent focused on being an ally to publishers and first-party hardware makers, by delivering them audiences they don’t reach today."

Digital downloads are still a small, but fast-growing business. According to the NPD group, 17 percent of games sold in 2008 by PC gamers were digitally downloaded. Microsoft and Sony are trying to convert console gamers who have become accustomed to consuming music and movies digitally via services like Netflix and Apple Inc’s iTunes.

Wedbush Morgan Securities analyst Michael Pachter estimates digitally downloaded games will account for roughly 2 percent of industry sales this year, or around $400 million. He expects demand to double annually for a few years, to $800 million in 2010 and $1.6 billion by 2011.

"As broadband penetration increases and the Internet connection migrates to the living room, downloads or cloud computing solutions will become much more viable," he said.

"Downloads will become 20 percent of the market within five years, and probably peak at around 50 percent of the overall market in 10 years," said Pachter. This assumes an overall market growth of 5 to 10 percent annually, he added.

With video game sales growth slowing somewhat, publishers and developers are seeking new channels to reach customers.

Yet some retailers resist the format, arguing that going through a third-party online distributor further saps margins for both developers and retail chains. Analysts say the big retail chains like Wal-Mart and Target have also yet to embrace and invest in digital sales.

"Nothing that has been digitally distributed retains the same value as a retail version; it’s always less," GameStop CEO Dan DeMatteo said in September.

Getting content on demand is no stranger to households accustomed to watching movies over set-top boxes, or teens streaming music over the Internet. But spontaneously ordering a game is stymied somewhat by the limits of the gamers’ personal computer system.

Some fledgling companies try to work around that.

Over the past seven years, entrepreneur Steve Perlman has been developing a digital distribution box called OnLive. He hopes to offer high-definition PC games on low-end hardware.

OnLive has struck deals with Electronic Arts Inc, Ubisoft, Take Two Interactive, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, THQ, Epic Games,

Eidos, Atari and Codemasters. While the company had 16 games on display in March at the Game Developers Conference, it had no presence on the E3 show floor.

OnLive this fall is slated to launch a subscription service similar to Microsoft’s Xbox Live.

NPD estimates 18 percent of Xbox 360 users who have a "Gold" membership to Microsoft’s Xbox Live service regularly download from Xbox Live Arcade, and 10 percent of PlayStation 3 users regularly buy digitally from Sony’s PlayStation Network.

The largest independent games distribution network is Valve Software’s Steam, which has 21 million users and 700 games.

Doug Lombardi, vice president of marketing at Valve Software - known as the groundbreaking backers of the "Half-Life" shooter series - said digital distribution has already been largely embraced by the industry.

But the real forte of digital distribution may be the ability to provide automatic updates and extras, keeping things new as with the Team Fortress multiplayer-shooter series.

"Now that games can be connected to their audience, they will last and grow well beyond their traditional 6-month to 1-year sales cycle," Lombardi said.

Judge Tosses Patent Claim Against Nintendo

A judge has dismissed a patent-infringement lawsuit against Nintendo over the company’s Wii video game machine.

The order from U.S. District Court Judge Manuel Real in Los Angeles comes less than six months after the lawsuit by Guardian Media Technologies Ltd. was filed.

The claims against Nintendo are part of a bigger lawsuit against retailers and electronics makers over parental-control technologies that Guardian Media has patented.

The judge ruled that Nintendo did not infringe Guardian Media’s patent.

"At the earliest stages of this case, Nintendo convinced the court to dismiss this case as Guardian’s patent had nothing to do with Nintendo’s products," Rick Flamm, senior vice president of legal and general counsel for Nintendo of America, said in a statement.

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EU: Browser-Free Windows Gives No Real Choice

European Union regulators said Friday that Microsoft Corp. was offering less choice, not more, by vowing to sell the next version of Windows without any Web browsers at all.

Microsoft said Thursday that it would remove its Internet Explorer browser - and not include any alternatives - in the Windows 7 software it will sell from Oct. 22 in Europe to soothe EU antitrust concerns.

The company is trying to avoid new EU fines on top of a previous euro1.7 billion after being earlier charged with unfairly using its operating system monopoly to squeeze into other software markets.

But the European Commission said it preferred to see consumers offered a choice of browser "not that Windows would be supplied without a browser at all."

"Rather than more choice, Microsoft seems to have chosen to provide less," it said.

It will soon decide whether Microsoft had violated EU antitrust law since 1996 by tying the browser to its ubiquitous Windows operating system which is installed on most of the world’s desktop computers.

A "must carry" option that would offer several browsers was a better option, the EU executive suggested, because "consumers should be provided with a genuine choice of browsers" on the software that manufacturers install on computers.

It said Microsoft’s solution would give no choice to the 5 percent of consumers who buy Windows software in a stand-alone pack, as opposed to pre-installed on a computer. Microsoft said it will give PC users who want the browser a way to obtain it.

But regulators were more positive about the larger market - which sells software to computer manufacturers - saying Microsoft’s decision meant they could choose to install Internet Explorer or one or more other browsers.

The European Commission said it would have to weigh up whether this would actually create genuine consumer choice.

It warned that it would still have to look at "the long standing nature of Microsoft’s conduct" and whether the removal of Internet Explorer "could be negated by other actions by Microsoft."

The EU charged Microsoft with monopoly abuse in January, following a complaint from tiny rival Norway’s Opera Software ASA, which said Microsoft was unfairly using its power as the dominant supplier of operating system software to squeeze out browser competitors.

Mozilla Corp., which makes the Firefox browser, and Google Inc. have signed on as third parties against Microsoft in the case.

Microsoft’s browser is the most widely used worldwide, but Firefox is gaining in popularity and Google, the top Web search provider, has

released its own Web browser, Chrome.

Spam Drops 15 Percent After FTC Pricewert Takedown

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission’s recent takedown of an Internet service provider thought to be a safe haven for spammers has reduced spam volumes, but only by a little.

According to e-mail security vendor Marshal8e6, total spam volume dropped by about 15 percent last week, as the FTC got a court order to pull the plug on a notorious ISP named Pricewert. "We noticed quite a drop-off mid to late last week," said Phil Hay, a threat analyst with Marshal8e6. "Things got pretty quiet compared to what we’d been seeing."

Pricewert, which also did business under the name 3FN, was knocked off-line after the companies that provided it access to the Internet stopped doing business with it. This happened after the FTC was granted a temporary restraining order Tuesday in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California.

According to the FTC, Pricewert was home to a host of illegal activity including the distribution of viruses, phishing, spyware and child pornography. In a statement, the FTC said Pricewert "actively shielded its criminal clientele by either ignoring take-down requests issued by the on-line security community, or shifting its criminal elements to other Internet protocol addresses it controlled to evade detection."

The ISP has said that the alleged criminal activity on its network was the result of bad customers and not its fault.

Pricewert lists its principal place of business as Belize City, Belize, but it operated out of a DataPipe data center in San Jose, California, the FTC said.

Pricewert was thought to be home to several servers used to control computers infected with the Cutwail Trojan program (also known as Pushdo). Criminals had been using these infected machines to pump out spam messages, and right before the takedown the ISP was responsible for about 30 percent of the spam tracked by Marshal8e6.

Last November, spam levels dropped close to 50 percent after notorious ISP McColo was taken off-line by its upstream providers, and it took months for spam levels to rebound to the same volume.

However, the results from the Pricewert takedown were not as dramatic.

According to data from Cisco Systems, spam levels dropped about 30 percent at the end of last week but rebounded to normal levels on Sunday and Monday.

Security experts say that following the dramatic McColo incident, spammers may have put better backup systems in place to maintain control of their botnets of hacked computers. "Obviously, this was not a McColo. They were ready for the takedown," said Richard Cox, chief information officer with Spamhaus, an anti-spam group. "We’ve seen the backups pop up and have to get taken down and so on."

Safari 4 Launches, Snow Leopard Coming in September

Apple on Monday launched its next-generation browser, Safari, and gave details on the Snow Leopard OS X update.

Apple said during its Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) that the operating system would be available in September. Apple presenters took the time to denigrate Windows 7 as merely a version of the much-derided Vista. Windows 7 will launch on October 22, according to Microsoft. Snow Leopard will only run on Intel-based Macs, so older IBM PowerPC based Mac PCs are out in the cold with Snow Leopard.

Safari 4 will cost just $29 to current Leopard users, but doesn’t offer much in the way of new features for end users.

Its inner plumbing takes advantage of new trends in PC hardware, such as 64-bit and multicore CPUs, along with faster graphics processing hardware. The most noticeable feature for end users will be its built-in support for Microsoft Exchange mail, contacts, and calendars, and a new version of QuickTime called QuickTime X. Installation will be 45 percent faster and opening JPEF image files and PDF documents will be 2 and 1.5 times as fast, respectively.

"We’ve built on the success of Leopard and created an even better experience for our users from installation to shutdown," said Bertrand Serlet, Apple’s senior vice president of software engineering. "Apple engineers have made hundreds of improvements so with Snow Leopard your system is going to feel faster, more responsive and even more reliable than before."

The Safari 4 browser is available today as a download for Mac OS X (Leopard and Tiger) and Windows. It’s notable for an iTunes-like Cover Flow interface for viewing history, and Top Sites view that shows your most visited sites in a 3D grid view.

Featurewise the brower is indistinguishable from the Safari beta I tested. Apple again claimed that the browser was faster than Google’s Chrome, the current leader in my testing. A retest showed that it took 1707 milliseconds to complete the SunSpider JavaScript Benchmark, whereas Chrome 2 took 1656 on the same PC, so they’re neck-in-neck.

"The successful beta release helped us fine tune Safari 4 into an even better, faster version that customers are going to love," said Philip Schiller, Apple’s senior vice president of Worldwide Product Marketing. "Safari is enjoyed by 70 million users worldwide and with its blazing fast speed, innovative features and support for modern web standards, it’s the best browser on any platform."

Most Firms Unaware of Web Domain Changes

Two thirds of businesses are unaware they will be able to use their own name in place of domain extensions such as .com, .org, or .net when Internet domains are liberalized next year, according to a survey.

The change would let the likes of Nike or Microsoft control their own domain and better exploit their brands, and also counter cyber-squatters who use variations of brands on the 280 or so existing domain extensions.

"If you have ’.nike’, for example, you can create real and specific branded Websites, like ’running.nike’ or ’runlondon.nike’," Joe White, chief operating officer of domain registrar Gandi.net, told Reuters in an interview.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which oversees domain names, is expected to start taking applications for new top-level domains early next year, said Future Laboratory, which conducted the research.

But the move is not on the radar of a majority of companies, the survey for Gandi.net found.

"(Companies) are generally completely unaware of this change coming down the line," said White. "This change has not yet permeated into the mainstream for businesses or consumers."

"However, those businesses which are aware actually see the prospect as being quite exciting," he said.

The price of $185,000 will initially limit applications to the largest corporations and organizations, said Tom Savigar, Strategy and Insight Director at The Future Laboratory.

ICANN is expecting 300-500 applications when it opens its doors in the first quarter of next year, he said.

"You’ll see the big global corporations getting there early to own more of their online space," he said.

"(Owning their domain) could secure a higher level of credibility and recognition."

Smaller businesses will be able to use more specific extensions to match their business sector or geography such as ".london" or ".paris," he said.

The Future Laboratory surveyed 100 e-commerce managers; 50 from high-street companies and 50 from small and medium businesses online.

Microsoft Will Soon Unveil Free Anti-virus Software

Microsoft Corp is getting ready to unveil a long-anticipated free anti-virus service for personal computers that will compete with products sold by Symantec Corp and McAfee Inc.

A Microsoft spokesman said on Wednesday that the world’s biggest software maker is testing an early version of the product with its own employees. Microsoft would "soon" make a trial version, or product beta, available via its website, he added, but declined to provide a specific date.

Investors are closely monitoring the free service, code-named Morro after Brazil’s Morro de Sao Paolo beach, amid concern it could hurt

sales of products from Symantec and McAfee, which generate billions of dollars of revenue a year protecting Windows PCs from attacks by hackers.

"It’s a long-term competitive threat," said Daniel Ives, an analyst with FBR Capital Markets, though he added that the near-term impact was minimal.

Microsoft has said that Morro will offer basic features for fighting a wide range of viruses, which would likely make it comparable to low-end consumer products from Symantec and McAfee that cost about $40 per year.

Their top-selling products are security suites that come with features including encryption, firewalls, password protection, parental controls and data backup.

Three years ago, Microsoft entered that market with Live OneCare, which turned out to be a commercial flop. It announced plans in November to kill that product suite, saying it would launch the free Morro service by the end of 2009.

Analysts said they are looking forward to Morro’s beta to see exactly how its features compare to those in products from competitors.

Microsoft has said it will provide protection from several types of malicious software including viruses, spyware, rootkits and trojans.

Officials with Symantec and McAfee have said they do not see Morro as a threat.

"Microsoft’s free product is basically a stripped down version of the OneCare product Microsoft pulled from the shelves," said Symantec Consumer division president Janice Chaffin. "A full Internet security suite is what consumers require today to stay fully protected."

Joris Evers, a spokesman for No. 2 security software maker McAfee, said his company is already enjoying strong growth despite competition from free anti-virus products that are on the market.

"On a level playing field, we are confident in our ability to compete with anyone who might enter the marketplace," he said.

A spokeswoman for Trend Micro Inc, the No. 3 player, declined to comment.

Microsoft’s Free Antivirus: Is This An Apology?

Who should know more about PC threats than the company whose software makes most of them possible? Is Microsoft’s upcoming, free anti-malware app the company’s way of apologizing to customers?

Not hardly. The free service, codenamed "Morro" and due in beta "soon," appears only after years of Microsoft trying and failing to sell a protection product called "OneCare," which routinely landed low in the protection ratings.

As I said, you’d think Microsoft would know more about solving its own security problems than anyone, but if that were really true, we’d face fewer problems in the first place, right?

Microsoft also badly needs to do something to add zing to the Windows 7 release. That’s zing, not Bing, which will, presumably, already be in Windows 7. Maybe Morro is supposed to be the feature people will upgrade to get.

There are times when even "free" isn’t worth the price, and Morro may be one of them. Granted, it’s not even in beta yet, but Morro will have to do much better than Microsoft’s previous efforts to be worth anyone’s time.

Morro’s real-time anti-malware service, which will route all the URLs you want to visit by Microsoft first for a check against known malware sites, ought to be a winner. As quickly as Microsoft finds out about a malware location, it would immediately protect Morro users from it.

Of course, this requires that the Morro servers not slow down the user’s browser performance and raises privacy concerns. What will Microsoft do with all your browsing data? Nothing too bad, I suspect, but it’s always worth wondering and asking.

We also don’t know whether Morro will always be free and what operating systems it will support. If it’s Windows 7-only and turns out to be good, Microsoft will have missed a golden opportunity to build goodwill. If it turns out to be OneCare Part II, XP users will be glad we couldn’t download it by mistake.

That puts Morro firmly onto my "wait-and-see" product list.

You may also be wondering what impact Morrot will have on the entrenched anti-badstuff companies, such as McAfee and Symantec. Probably zero, at least in the near-term. Theoretically, a really great Morro, available for all Microsoft desktop operating systems could kick the legs from under consumer protection software.

It is hard to believe that will happen, though it would be a welcome end to consumers not being protected nearly as much as they need to be. It is hard to argue with free protection, though it is already available. It could be that the wide promotion of paid consumer products simply drowns out the free options that are available, such as Grisoft AVG and Avast.

Granted, that’s not great software, but the price is right if you need something and aren’t willing to spend.

Maybe that’s what Morro will be: A last-ditch attempt to get protection to people who don’t understand the need for it. Microsoft could actually name it Zing - as in "Zing the Bad Guys!" - and spend another $100 million advertising it. Or maybe "Zap," "Pow," or best of all, "Bang!"

Probably not, but Morro, while worth watching is not yet something to get excited about. Unless, of course, it’s a slow summer day and the iced tea is running low.

AOL Buys Two Web Startups

Internet pioneer AOL, which Time Warner plans to spin off into an

independent company later this year, announced on Thursday that it had bought two small Web startups focused on local content.

AOL, in a statement, said it had purchased Patch Media Corp., a local news and information platform for local communities, and Going Inc., a platform for sharing information about events in major cities.

Financial terms of the deals were not disclosed.

"Local remains one of the most disaggregated experiences on the Web today -- there’s a lot of information out there but simply no way for consumers to find it quickly and easily," said Tim Armstrong, who was hired away from Google this year to become AOL chairman and chief executive.

"It’s a space that’s prime for innovation and an area where AOL has a significant audience and a valuable mapping service in MapQuest," he said.

"Going forward, local will be a core area of focus and investment for AOL," Armstrong said. "The acquisitions of Patch and Going will help us build out our local network further."

Patch.com is currently available in five local communities in the United States and expects to be available in a dozen by the end of the year.

Going.com provides information for young people about what is going on in major US cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami and Boston.

"By joining with AOL, we have the opportunity to greatly expand the reach of our platform to more cities both in the US and around the world," said Going chief executive Evan Schumacher.

AOL is currently the number four gateway to the Web after Google, Microsoft sites and Yahoo! and has been trying to refashion itself recently as a popular one-stop portal.

CIA Adopting Web 2.0 Tools Despite Resistance

The CIA is adopting Web 2.0 tools such as blogs and collaborative wikis, but not without a struggle in an agency with an ingrained culture of secrecy, CIA officers said Friday.

"We’re still kind of in this early adoptive stage," said Sean Dennehy, a CIA analyst and self-described "evangelist" for Intellipedia, the US intelligence community’s version of the popular user-curated online encyclopedia Wikipedia.

"There’s a lot of cultural issues we have to encounter with bringing this kind of open source ethos into the intelligence community," Dennehy said during a panel discussion organized by the Washington office of Internet giant Google.

The Central Intelligence Agency analyst recalled Mahatma Gandhi’s quote: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."

"We’ve been ignored, we’ve been laughed at, on occasion we’ve been

fought and we haven’t won yet," he said.

Dennehy said Intellipedia, which runs on secure government intranets and is used by 16 US intelligence agencies, was started as a pilot project in 2005 and formally launched in April 2006.

"From that point to where we are here in 2009 it’s been a struggle," he said. "Some people have (supported it) but there’s still a lot of other folks kind of sitting on the fence."

A number of colleagues with a "fair amount of seniority" are active users, however, who see Intellipedia as "a potential tool that is a gamechanger," he added.

Dennehy said blogs and wikis were "a challenge to our culture because we grew up in this kind of ’need to know’ culture and now we need a balance between ’need to know’ and ’need to share.’"

"Trying to implement these tools in the intelligence community is basically like telling people that their parents raised them wrong," he said. "It is a huge cultural change."

"We actually had people kind of go through Intellipedia in the early days taking notes down on which pages were wrong and then sending it up to their chain of command," he said.

A desire to compartamentalize information was another problem, he said.

"Inevitably, every person, the first question we were asked is ’How do I lock down a page?’ or ’How do I lock down a page so that just my five colleagues can access that?’

"We said ’Go somewhere else,’" Dennehy said. "Go send another email."

"Because this is different and it’s going to undercut the power of these tools if we start introducing locks into a culture that’s already somewhat risk averse," he explained.

Dennehy said Intellipedia was now averaging about 4,000 edits a day.

Calvin Andrus, a CIA innovation officer and 26-year veteran of the agency, told the gathering that the collaborative and immediate nature of a wiki made it a powerful tool in an age with a need for instant communications.

"The wiki is a bunch of people writing in a collective way and it can change and adapt very quickly to the news," Andrus said. "You don’t have to take yesterday’s news and publish it tomorrow."

He recalled that because of the slow nature of communications, back then the Battle of New Orleans between British and American forces was fought in January 1815 although a peace treaty had been signed weeks earlier.

"In Iraq we’ve had an example where we learned, or we had some intelligence, that there were some bad guys in a restaurant and 15 minutes later bombs were dropping," he said.

"We’re in a world where the number of policy decisions made per unit of time is increasing exponentially," he said.

China Defends Web-Filtering Software Requirement

China on Tuesday defended a new requirement that personal computers sold in the country carry a software that filters online content, saying the program is targeted at preventing the spread of pornography and other "unhealthy" content.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology posted on its Web site Tuesday a notice to all PC makers that they will be required to pre-load the "Green Dam-Youth Escort" filtering software on units to be sold in China as of July 1, including imported PCs.

The move has been met with criticism by at least one U.S.-based industry trade group, which denounced China’s efforts "to build censorship capabilities right into the hardware."

Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang defended the government’s administration of the Internet, saying it was in accordance with the law and that the software "is aimed at blocking and filtering some unhealthy content, including pornography and violence."

China, which has the world’s largest population of Internet users at more than 250 million, also has one of the world’s tightest controls over the Internet.

Beijing routinely blocks political sites, especially ones it considers socially destabilizing such as sites that challenge the ruling Communist Party, promote democratic reform or advocate independence for Tibet.

The government also bans Internet pornography and this year launched a nationwide crackdown that led to the closing of more than 1,900 Web sites. Web sites including Google and Baidu, China’s most popular search engine, also have been criticized for linking to suspect sites.

"If you have a child, or if you’re expecting a child, I think you could understand the concerns of parents about the unhealthy contents on the Internet," Qin said at a regular briefing.

The IT ministry’s notice to computer makers said the "Green Dam" program would either be installed on the hard drive or enclosed on a compact disc. The notice said PC makers would be required to tell authorities how many PCs they have shipped with the software, which is made by a Chinese developer under contract with the government.

"Blocking access to pornography sounds like an acceptable goal," said Washington-based Computer & Communications Industry Association’s president, Ed Black. "But the problem is that it’s all too easy to use the same technology to expand the censorship."

Although porn sites are initially targeted, the program could be used to block other Web sites, too, including those based on keywords rather than specific Web addresses, although its developer said users could disable blocking of any site on the list or even uninstall the software completely.

Global PC Makers Vying for "Green" Crown

Personal computer makers are increasingly prioritizing "green" strategies, creating a pivotal point of competition for customers that are becoming more attuned to their financial - and societal - benefits.

Analysts say going green has become a business plan unto itself for the industry’s heavyweights: a way to stand apart from rivals, win over a growing segment of environmentally conscious consumers, and shore up branding worldwide.

The three major U.S. computer vendors - Hewlett-Packard Co, Dell Inc, and Apple Inc - argue that customers glean real benefits, for example lower power consumption in green-certified display screens.

"It’s really a green arms race, in which they’re trying to one up each other," said John Spooner, an analyst with Technology Business Research. "The good news is they’re all working in this direction and that’s going to benefit themselves, their customers and the environment."

Analysts point to certain efforts - such as Dell’s recycling program, Apple’s moves to remove toxic raw materials, and HP’s actions around packaging - as areas of success.

But the IT industry still accounts for an estimated 2 percent of global emissions of greenhouse gas carbon dioxide.

Consumers might have trouble picking out just who among the PC makers are making the right moves: Dell says it aims to become the "greenest technology company on Earth"; Apple lays claims to the "greenest family of notebooks"; and HP stresses it has a long tradition of environmentalism as well as the market size to effect change.

TBR recently ranked Dell No. 1 out of 40 technology companies on corporate sustainability. But a recent Greenpeace report ranked Apple best among the major PC makers.

While there are differences between the three in areas such as materials, PC power usage and recycling and packaging, analysts and environmental groups say, the green agenda is profiting from the competition between them.

Campaigns by interest groups like Greenpeace to praise or tweak PC makers have been particularly effective.

"Companies are realizing that consumers do use these environmental considerations as tiebreakers. It does help differentiate their products," Forrester’s Sally Cohen said.

Around 70 percent of companies surveyed in a recent report by Forrester Research cited product differentiation - the desire to stand out - as a business driver for their environmental strategies.

"It has struck a chord with consumers, businesses, stakeholders and NGOs," said Eric Lowitt, a research fellow at Accenture.

In interviews, Dell and HP - while each asserting leadership - downplayed talk of competition. They pointed out that any good sustainability strategy must be comprehensive, and span the company,

right down to its supply chain.

Some analysts say what may be more important than companies' actual green initiatives - often highly technical - is their ability to communicate them to the market.

Tod Arbogast, Dell's director of sustainable business, said there is actually some collaboration around green initiatives.

"I don't think we've reached the tipping point yet, I think we'll continue as an industry to innovate, challenge one another to go further. faster on these efforts," he said.

Bonnie Nixon, HP's director of sustainability, said green practices should be integrated throughout the company.

HP's "commitment has really been there, certainly through the 90's and the fact that society is really focusing on green right now is great. We're in an industry that can truly demonstrate" environmental leadership, she said.

20 Years Ago Today: Birth of the Dot-Com Era

It doesn't seem like it, but 20 years ago today, the dot-com era was born. On June 8, 1989, Brad Templeton, started Clarinet.com, an online newspaper business that many consider to be the company that started it all.

"ClariNet was the first company created to use the internet as its platform for business, and as such this event has a claim at being the birth of the 'dot-com' concept which so affected the world in the two intervening decades.," said Templeton, who for many years has been president and chairman of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

His electronic newspaper, which consisted of wire service stories and other content, was delivered using the USENET protocol, there being no HTTP until inventor Tim Berners-Lee launched it in late 1990.

"In those days, the Internet consisted of regional networks, who were mostly non-profit cooperatives, and the government funded 'NSFNet' backbone which linked them up," writes Templeton, a friend of many years' standing.

"That backbone had a no-commercial-use policy, but I found a way around it. In addition, a nascent commercial internet was arising with companies like UUNet and PSINet, and the seeds of Internet-based business were growing. There was no web, of course," Templeton writes in a history of ClariNet published for the anniversary.

"The internet's community lived in e-Mail and USENET. Those, and FTP file transfer, were the means of publishing. When Tim Berners-Lee would coin the term 'the web' a few years later, he would call all these the web, and HTML/HTTP a new addition and glue connecting them."

Brad is quick to point out that other companies can make similar claims from around the same time, but I was for many years a ClariNet user and it was the first "for pay" Internet content provider that I ran into.

This isn’t a boom-and-bust story, but one man’s engaging account of the early days of the medium you are using right now to read this. Brad is one of the pioneers and, like him, I remember those days-when an Internet connection was hard to come by-with great fondness.

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